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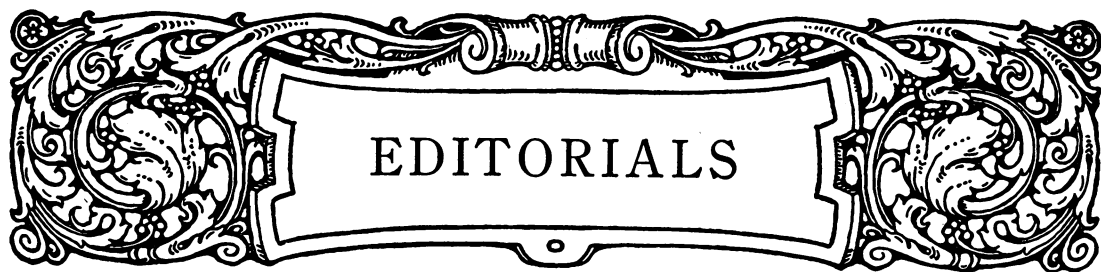
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MODERNISM AND POLITICS PLAY HAVOC WITH ART

PART II

WE are assuming that the American public knows the fundamental value of having the truth told about the moral rottenness as well as the moral health in the world of art; of the degenerate and negative forces as well as the noble and affirmative forces there to be found. No greater physician than the truth.

In an article some years ago in the Paris Magazine "Progrès," the historian Guglielmo Ferrero, speaking of what has been the practical effect of European philosophical quarreling since the Reformation, says: "It has either unloosened or sought to stifle the internal crisis which agitates, since the Reformation, all the branches of Christianity, the Protestant sects as well as the Catholic church; it prepared the grand upheaval of the French revolution, the convulsion of 1848, the unification of the smaller States into larger unities; it has undermined, or forbidden, in the whole of social life, the principle of authority, in either spreading or combating the critical spirit; it has contributed to topsy-turvy the world of art by inventing all sorts of new aesthetic theories, more or less absurd, and in throwing us into the present state of aesthetic anarchy, where no one has any longer any principle for distinguishing the beautiful from the ugly."

We think the public knows this anarchy exists in art, is disgusted with it, and will welcome its destruction.

To abolish it we must both destroy and construct at the same time. This we will try to do. But we must first destroy the basis of the claim to public respect made by those who are the cause of this anarchy in art—the modernistic art party—and prove that the growth of the party was not a natural but rather an artificial one, helped much by the politicians of Paris.

In the last number of the magazine it was shown that the father of Modernism in Art was utterly unworthy of our respect, because he was an alcoholic, drug and sex pervers, and his hypnotized followers and admirers, nearly all of them, were steeped more or less in a detestable so-called "Naturalistic" eroticism and licentiousness. The exceptions were few. We will now show how Politics helped along the success of this movement; above all, outside of France.

But at the outset we must say that at all times documentary proofs of any truth are scarce, and that if we could furnish proof of all that we positively know and learned during a sojourn of twenty-five years in Paris, this number could not offer enough space for the documents. So we can give only some evidence of our contention, but sufficient to show the magnitude of the evil.

We repeat, France has been the center of the world of art since Louis XIV, who spent \$200,000,000 on the Palace of Versailles and its art, and, according to St. Simon, even more on Marly, which is now nothing but a hole in the ground.

It is easy to see, first: That this expenditure of \$400,000,000 on architecture, sculpture, painting and landscape gardening required a vast bureau of governmental functionaries. Second, that these functionaries would try to make their places sinecures by solidifying themselves by all kinds of subservience to the strongest man in power who had the most audacity and genius for intrigue. Third, that such a bureaucracy of art would establish a System with its traditions and customs as rigid as the laws of the Medes. Fourth, that hypocrisy, graft and all sorts of abuses would fatally become the underlying vices of the whole world of art as they are in the world of politics when governed by selfish politicians.

As long as the French monarchy was supreme, there were no art quarrels in the world of art worth chronicling. But as soon as the Revolution of 1793 triumphed, war in the world of art began.

First, the politicians merged the academies of Literature, of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture with the Academies of Moral and Political Science and Belles-Lettres into one body, which they called: The Institute, and this has been maintained to this day.

Second, the Italo-Roman-Classic-Academic spirit of the monarchy dominated until about 1800, when the political individualism of Rousseau having had its effect, artistic individualism followed suit under Napoleon, and began to assert itself in 1804 with Baron Gros. And ever since then there has been a never-ceasing war between the Academy-ins and its envious enemies the Academy-outs.

And when we reflect over the fathomless lying, hypocrisy and treachery witnessed in the political campaign in this country, just passed, filling the air with hate and venom, we may sense what politics in art has done in France. For in France art is not, as with us, a secondary matter, it is a primary matter.

France's commercial supremacy in many markets has depended entirely upon her reputation for being the center of the art of the world, but also the great source from which flows an endless stream of *Nouveautés de Paris*. And this is still more true since 1851, when at the Crystal Palace in London, France beat the world in Industrial Art. For since then all Europe has been trying to catch up with and outstrip her in the race for a reputation

for taste—above all for *originality* plus refinement of taste.

Since the French Government is intensely alive to the success of French commerce it has organized a veritable art "system," which ramifies all through the nation like the nerves of the body. The Government takes the child in hand in the backwoods village school, as soon as it manifests imagination and artistic skill, and fosters it from the village to Paris, then through to Rome, then back to Paris, and then presses out of it all its virtue—in the interests of the State.

More than ever before France has been anxious since 1850 to find, first of all originality, then novelty, then only beauty, thus reversing the process that had obtained from the very beginning of time; *i. e.*, to find first beauty, then originality and lastly novelty.

This hunger for novelty instead of the beautiful was not engendered by the Exhibition of 1851, it had its origin in the Romantic movement of 1830. But the London Exhibition so accentuated this hunger because of the rivalry the Exhibition aroused, that originality became a national and also a commercial hunger.

Hence this commercial element gradually permeated the whole French world of art, until many artists, dealers and critics became wholly commercial in the low sense of the term. They worked no longer for the glory of art and of France, but for their pocket.

The French Academy having from the start been a monarchical institution, its very traditions made it lean towards a monarchical form of government, and to cause it to believe that a Republic never would produce any great art, because it had no faith that a democracy could ever build great public buildings and decorate them with magnificent works of art. In which they were mistaken.

Therefore when Napoleon III made his *coup d'état* and destroyed the second republic, the Academy quickly supported him and he in return supported the Academy.

Monarchies do not object to progress. But it must be slow, without jolts. Hence the Academy strongly opposed any revolutionary "novelties" in art.

Therefore when the boisterous Baudelaire—of whom we spoke in our last article—yelled out: "Give us something new to drown our ennui!"; and when Delacroix broached his dictum—that color is more important in art than line and pattern—the Academy fiercely opposed them, and was backed up by Napoleon. No doubt it went to excess and into a kind of "stand-pat" opposition to *all* innovations, and so no doubt it rejected at the exhibitions of the Salon and in all literary productions many works that should have been received and given a chance before the public.

Through their stand-patism the budding Modernist art party became consolidated and grew in numbers, thanks also to the growth of the republican reaction against the usurper Napoleon III, which had grown to such proportions that finally they so shook the throne that Napoleon felt obliged to look around for a foreign war—in order to occupy the nation outside of France—and so fell an easy victim to Bismarck's bait by which he tricked him into the disastrous war of 1870.

In the year 1863 the works of a number of *mod-*

erate Modernists like Whistler, Bracquemond, Jongkind, Fantin-Latour, Renoir, Legros, etc., were rejected by the Jury of the Salon either because of violence of subject or of offensively individual technical stunting.

The Press and Politicians opposed to Napoleon and the monarchistic Academy which supported him had already become so strong that they were able to raise a clamor loud enough to force Napoleon to make this concession: those works refused by the jury should be shown in a separate gallery in the same Palais de l'Industrie, close to the official Salon. And this was known as the "Salon des Refusés."

Here we have the first proof of the baleful rôle played by violent politics in art in France. Art at once became the shuttlecock battered about by the fiercely hating Republican and Monarchical politicians, the artists on both sides desperately using the politicians and all their nefarious wiles to carry their point.

The second proof is furnished by a very well known art-collector, Théo. Duret, in his book on Manet.

That artist made his public début in the Salon des Refusés in 1863 with his "Breakfast on the Grass," which roused great opposition among the public on account of its suggestion of licentiousness, and this in spite of the fact that the epoch was one of the most corrupt since Louis XV. As we will discuss his works in a later article, we will now quote only the following from his eulogizer Duret:

"At this moment, in 1879, Manet, at the summit of his career, had won a kind of renown which was destined to belong to him during his life. He was one of the best known men in Paris. Every one knew who he was. But among the mass of the people, and even among that limited number known by the term *Tout Paris* he remained misunderstood. He was always regarded as nothing but an excessive, violent artist, without the qualities of the true master and in fine he was still the reprobate he was at his début."

This proves that if Duret and his friends and a few others patronized Manet, the great French public rejected him, even after twenty years of fierce struggle to make himself accepted. He died in 1883.

At once Duret, a collector, Durand-Ruel, a dealer, and their friends decided to give an exhibition of his work in the École des Beaux-Arts, the National School of Fine Arts. His pictures had been fiercely condemned for their moral laxity not only by the National Academy, but by the French people. And for what purpose did they want this exhibition?—to raise the commercial value of his paintings and to help along the triumph of this new movement.

This attempt by the Modernistic Art Party to force the doors of the Beaux-Arts for the purpose of giving Manet a posthumous triumph in the very heart of the domain of the Academic Party, was surely "forcing the game."

Duret tells how he made a first request for the use of the Hall upon M. Kaempfen, Director of Fine Arts:

"I called on M. Kaempfen. He was an old friend. When I explained to him my request he was much astonished, said he could not grant it, and, with benevolent candor, reproached me for having placed him under the obligation of refusing my request and for having called on him for so extraordinary a purpose. . . .

"When I made known the refusal of the Director of Fine Arts we decided to call on the Prime Minister, Jules Ferry. I had also been friendly with him for a long time and I knew well enough that his artistic tastes were so similar to those of M. Kaempfen to convince me, that if I went to Ferry, he would positively refuse me as his subordinate had done.

"So I went to Antonin Proust, Deputy and former Minister (of Fine Arts under Gambetta). He took me with him and we went to the Ministry. . . .

"When we were received by Jules Ferry, M. Proust told him, in formal terms, that he wanted the École des Beaux Arts for a posthumous exhibition of the works of Manet. I can still see the somersault of Ferry, much disturbed. But the question of æsthetic judgment disappeared before political necessity and, as Prime Minister, he had to accord us (under pressure) without resistance, the favor we solicited. . . . It was therefore through the political influence then possessed by M. Antonin Proust that the friend of Manet had to obtain the École des Beaux Arts to exhibit his works."

Duret also says: "M. Proust then had the idea of inviting the President of the Republic, M. Jules Grévy, to visit the projected exhibition." . . .

"M. Grévy thanked us very cordially for our call. . . . But I understood that in his eyes it was impossible for a President of the Republic to commit himself to visit the exhibition of an artist so much attacked as was Manet. . . . The exhibition was held in 1884."

Finally Manet's friends, collectors and dealers interested in having the value of his works raised opened a campaign to have his "Olympia"—a public courtesan naked on a bed, with a shoe-string about her neck, a black cat at her feet and a negress bringing her a bouquet—forced into the Luxembourg Museum through their political influence.

Says Duret: "The intention of offering the 'Olympia' to the State was made public in the daily press. . . . Yes! they were willing to accept one of his works for the Luxembourg Museum, but they spoke evil of the 'Olympia.' They were willing to have a picture of his, but not that one." On account of its licentious suggestiveness, though accepted by the Jury of the Salon of 1865, the picture had raised a public riot, showing that however corrupt a few of the artists were, the French people, as always, were sound at heart.

"But" says Duret the interested collector "the friends of Manet decided to make no concession. They had precisely chosen the 'Olympia' as an offering to the State"—for which they had raised by subscription \$4,000. "It was the historic picture which recalled the universal contempt for it at the time when only Baudelaire and Zola had dared to affront the public anger in declaring their admiration for it. . . . The friends of Manet persisted all the more in their purpose. Then we saw the two parties which had existed for and against Manet, and which had for a long time locked horns, start up and again open the fight. *Each party used every means by which to influence public opinion, and the press served as the vehicle for articles and letters of all kinds.*"

In short, by all sorts of political intrigue in which figured Camille Pelletan, one of the most corrupt anarchists in the history of French politics, the combination of modernistic artists, with speculative

collectors, art dealers and radical politicians, this miserably degenerate though clever painting was actually "jimmied" into the Luxembourg Museum in 1890, and ten years later into the Louvre, to the disgust of the highest class of French people.

Says Duret: "The people who formerly overheated themselves in trying to reject the 'Olympia' gasped. They prophesied the corruption of public taste. The announced the irremediable decadence of art."

How true this prophecy was, the monstrous and utterly degrading stuff of the morally debased and intellectually warped Cubists, Vorticists and Futurists of the present day fully proves. One more proof of the havoc politicians have played in art.

In 1873 the three Royalist parties of France coalesced to elect General McMahon to the presidency of the newly made Republic. They schemed to destroy it. They were aided by the then Academy, which was at heart Royalist, because it did not believe in the possibility of a Democracy fostering Art—in which they were to be undeceived.

The *coup d'état* failed. The Republic was saved. And then began a campaign against the Academy all along the line by the furious Republican politicians.

Among these was Turquet, one of the bravest but most violent politicians of that epoch. He was finally made Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts in 1879, and again in 1885. He was a man of great political influence and, having become a partisan of the opposition to the Academy, he fought it at every step by favoring everything which could destroy the prestige and influence of that old, royalistic body. Hence he threw all his power into the camp of the Modernists, who, by their press, have labeled themselves Progressives, liberators of the Academy, oppressed artists and protagonists of the reputation for originality in French art so much needed by France in her struggle for commercial supremacy through art-industry of all kinds.

Thus it is that the State threw all its weight to the Modernistic Art Party and its henchmen in Parliament, all the more, since these artists were then æsthetically still sane, even though the sexopathic virus spawned upon them by the neurotic Baudelaire and the vulgar "naturalism" of his friend Zola had begun to tinge their art with vulgarity and veiled immorality.

Some day, when the patient historian digs out and coordinates all the proofs of the violent hatred of the politicians of Paris against the Academy on account of its leaning towards a Royalist régime, the world will understand more fully how this governmental campaign against the Academy and all its traditions, practically a governmental one, became effective in discrediting the Academy and all it stood for of nobility in design, purity of spirit and ideal beauty in the works produced by its partisans in the sacred world of art!

The entire Republican press was organized against the Academy; books written against it; literary men of talent became excessivists in their opposition—true to the French proverb: "Man does everything by excess!"

So bitter was the war that the usually sane æsthetician Eugène Véron classed Raphael among the artists who had no genius but merely talent, all

because the Academy had made Raphael its spiritual guide in the matter of picture-making.

So powerful did the press-hacks, critics known to be corrupt, and the corrupt art dealers become, through the support of Turquet and those who followed him in the Ministry of Fine Arts; so much noise did they make; to such an extent did they make foreign critics and artists and museum authorities believe that the entire French public of culture was back of them, that some of the brightest minds in England, Germany and even America became warped. And so, while the French people refused to bow down to the modernistic theories of license in life and liberty in art, the party triumphed outside of France. But most of all in those nations whose people leaned towards *mysticism*, like the Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, Russians, Bohemians, etc. While in the common-sense nations like England, Italy, Spain, Canada, Australia and the United States, and even France itself, it succeeded only among the art speculators and corrupt dealers who, misled by the noise made in the press by the modernistic party in Paris, gambled on the *future value* of their creations as they might gamble in wheat and pork.

Lately Rodin, one of the leaders of the Modernists, has offered the, to him now useless, plaster casts of his works to the State. According to despatches, when the matter was brought up in Parliament it was fiercely opposed by a number of conservative politicians and by the entire Socialist Party. But the majority of the Republican politicians, still fearing "the man on horseback" so much that the present war is as nearly anonymous as possible as regards individual generals, and still fearing the royalist microbe in the minds of the Academy, voted to accept Rodin's works—most of which ought to go on the dump outside the walls of the world of art. But the Socialists, about sixty in number, voted solidly against the acceptance of them—a very significant vote.

R. L. Stevenson once wrote in an epistolary discussion: "As to the value of what is said—that depends on who says it." True.

And Emerson said: "It makes all the difference in the world in the force of a sentence whether there is a man back of it or not." True.

Well, an examination of the lives and works of the fathers of the Modernistic art party shows that most of them were either alcoholic, drug or sex-pervers, or abnormal intellectually or morally; a number of them having gone insane because of their excessivism. They were not men in the Emersonian sense. Therefore their "say so" has no value from the Stevenson standpoint. Most of them were artistic waifs thrown hither and thither, individualistic white-caps on a sea of usually calm and sane life, raised by a political storm to formidable proportions and destined to disappear into oblivion, after doing much harm, as soon as the storm which made them possible and destructive shall have become a thing of memory.

This exposé of the seamy side of things in the art life of France should discourage neither the Ameri-

can public nor the lovers of art. Because, while the single stream of French art, from Louis XIV to 1850, then split on the rock of a false philosophy into two streams, and while one of these, the revolutionary and aberrant modernistic stream, side-tracked itself into the morass of anarchistic degeneracy, nevertheless the stream of common-sense kept quietly on, progressing by evolution and producing from 1875 to 1895 some of the greatest masterpieces in all the arts since time began—albeit also producing a mass of mediocre stuff, as is the rule in all great art epochs. Did not the Renaissance have to produce thousands of "Madonnas" before the sublime "Sistine Madonna" by Raphael could be created? In the Rockies from Mexico to Montana there is but one Pike's Peak to rise above the mediocre elevation of the mountain range. And Emerson says somewhere that nature wastes bushels of wormy crabs in her effort to produce one perfect apple. It is nature's way in apples and in art.

Before the war this modernistic poison had momentarily trivialized and benumbed the exquisite mind, not of France, but of Paris. But now the soul of France, as a nation, is again awake and dominant; and when the war is over it will most certainly sweep out this poison with its toxic effluvia; once again gathering her loins, France, again clear-eyed and star-searching, will, under the creative pressure of a sublime regenerative national emotion, once more produce a crop of such great masterpieces that the world will know that Gaul still lives!

What is the lesson all this teaches America? First, that the soul of France is at heart Classic. That when any style in art takes root within her borders it is transfigured until it becomes Classic in spirit, if not in form. That the Frenchman's love of elegance and common-sense in art is so supreme that the coarse and vulgar nauseate the vast majority of them, and that any production of France in any of the arts which goes against this spirit may be suspected by us as having its origin in some sort of fraudulent commercial speculation—often by foreign parasites and leeches living in France—degrading alike to the gamblers and a calumny on the soul of France.

Secondly, it teaches us that under no circumstances should the public of America ever allow Art to become the shuttlecock of politicians or allow any small body of men belonging to only one art party or tendency to dominate.

It also teaches us that the conservative and evolutionary art-forces should be more "vocal" as President Wilson says, and not leave all the beating of the drums in the hands of the hysterical revolutionary forces. Listen to them? Yes! But do not let them bulldoze the public by means of debauched political intrigue, as they have in France, to create havoc in the entire world of art.

For if we do commit this, henceforth criminal folly, of mixing Politics and Art, we will most surely warp our entire life into that highway which leads straight toward the Tophet of moral decay, of intellectual aberration and social disintegration.